

By Lisa Zapalac

Before Google

Since we were all educated BG — *Before Google* — it is an exciting challenge when we stretch our minds to imagine how best to educate a child who has never known the BG world, a child who will always know the world as Thomas Friedman characterizes it in his recent book, *The World is Flat*.

The average child sitting in second grade today will have 10–14 jobs by the time he or she reaches age 38. According to former Secretary of Education Richard Riley, the top 10 jobs most in demand in the year 2010 didn't exist in 2004.

We are preparing our students for jobs that don't yet exist, that will use technologies that haven't yet been invented, to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet.

Contrast this to the way we were all educated. Generally, we were taught in school systems that have had, from the dawn of the industrial age, the purpose of producing employees for boxed positions in corporate organizational charts that take the shape of pyramids.

Quoting a YouTube slide show called "Shift Happens," more than: 1.5 exabytes of unique information will be generated worldwide this year, and a week's worth of *The New York Times* contains more information than a person was likely to come across in a lifetime in the 18th century.

How do you educate a child in this type of world

of information and change? That's exactly the question, and the answer as well.

How you educate a child is what matters now.

Of course, there will always be necessary and important content in a school's curriculum, but the guiding light now is *how* you educate a child.

The first step of how we make this happen: context. Children need the right context. They need a family that values learning and working with others. They need a family that encourages curiosity and models passion.

Children also need a school environment that is nurturing. "Nurturing" is such a sweet word, you may underestimate it. Yes, nurturing means making a five-year-old feel happy and cared for and it means ensuring a 13-year-old feels known and valued for who he or she is. It means being friendly, greeting one another in morning carpool, and bending down to speak to those of us who are smaller. But it is not just about niceties — it is about creating the necessary environment to ensure a foundation a child can work from forever.

Authentic nurturing creates an environment of extraordinary trust, in which taking risks feels possible — and natural. Trust in an environment where we are cared for, valued, and where our opinions count propels innovation and collaboration.

Children who have spent

eight or nine years educated in this kind of environment believe in their own worth. They are comfortable asking questions, trying new things, and pursuing ideas. These are essential skills for our children to have as they enter a flat world.

A story I heard last week provides a good example. It is about a girl who graduated from our school last year after being here seven years — since second grade. She went on to a much larger and more complex public high school, and she arrived there with a firm but nurturing foundation. Her AP math teacher said it best when, after the third day of classes, she asked, "Can anyone else but this young lady answer this question?"

We very purposefully create an environment where nurturing translates into high-trust. Without trust there is no risk-taking and without risk-taking there is no innovation. Trust in self and others is essential in a world of collaboration.

How we teach our children matters arguably more than *what* we teach them, and many of these critical choices are made in the classroom.

We are focused on teaching our students how to learn — how to constantly absorb and teach yourself new ways of doing old things — or new ways of doing new things. That is an ability every person must cultivate in an age when parts or all of many jobs are constantly exposed to automation and outsourcing, and where new jobs, and whole new industries, will be churned up faster and

faster. What you know today will be out-of-date sooner than you think. In such a world, it is not only *what* you know, but also *how* you learn that will set you apart.

Therefore, every child must learn how to learn. A teacher teaches this persistently, through every learning context he or she sets up. As our faculty members work together, we think very carefully, very deliberately about how we teach our classroom lessons. There are so many choices to make. Lectures or mini-lessons? Small groups or whole class? In desks or on the rug in a circle? Reading time spent doing worksheets or spent with students reading individual books? Writing using prompts, or teaching children to write from their experiences?

How you teach matters, because it is in the *way* you teach that you teach the most lasting lessons.

The nature of the work our students do matters greatly. The contexts we immerse them in matter. How we teach them matters, and changes the lessons they implicitly learn along the way, as we also teach the *what*.

The flat world is a world you and I have found ourselves in, but our students are walking straight toward a career in the flat world with great joy. It is our job to nurture them along the way, in partnership with parents, and to create learning contexts that will ensure they develop the skills needed to produce a well-rounded child in a flat world.

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